

of Lollardry. The schools of Oxford, the intellectual centre of England, were captured by the orthodox party.

The great University at this time occupied an independent place in English life and thought. It was not, as it became in the following century, an instrument used by the Church to force her own beliefs on the national intellect. It was not, as it became for a while under the Stuarts, a subservient body, willing to confirm the decrees of the Crown by its approval, and to defend the theory of tyranny in its schools. Oxford was at this time an intellectual world by itself, influencing the world outside, but jealous of outside interference. If it had not that liberty of thought in matters political and religious which the Universities enjoy to-day, it possessed more than other corporate bodies of the time. Owing half its privileges to the Pope and half to the Crown, it was not entirely in the hands of either power. Geographically, its site was well chosen to secure independence; it was not, like the University of Paris, seated under the very walls of the royal palace; it was far from Canterbury, it was very far from Eome, and there was no Bishop of Oxford; even Lincoln, the see to which it appertained, was more than a hundred miles distant. This independence was further strengthened by the prestige naturally belonging to a University which had admittedly no equal save Paris, and had surpassed even Paris in the production of men who gave the law to the learned throughout Europe. It is difficult for us to appreciate its singular importance as a national institution. The monastic schools where, in the days of Becket, the learning of the country had been centred, had sunk to be places of merely primary education in so far as they were educational at all. The grammar schools thickly scattered over the country only undertook to prepare boys for the University, so that the higher studies were monopolised by Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Of these one was so far inferior that it would be hard to find before the sixteenth century a single Cambridge man of any academical fame. Mediaeval Oxford, pre-eminent, proud and free, dared to admire and follow Wycliffe, the latest but not the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. F. Leach's *English Schools at the Reformation*, 103-8.